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WOMYN-ONLY SPACE IN THE DIANIC TRADITION:
LESSONS FROM PANTHEACON

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ABSTRACT

Womyn-only space in the Dianic tradition has been regularly questioned and challenged by other Pagan traditions, the trans community, and other women's spirituality groups. Incidents with two Dianic groups at PantheaCon 2011 and 2012 led to heated discussion in the Pagan community about gender and inclusion. This paper focuses on online discussions by self-identified Pagans, where three points were debated as a result of the PantheaCon incidents: defining the term "womyn" in womyn-only space; the accountability of community leaders; and the role of exclusionary spaces at large Pagan community events. While no specific resolution is recommended or conclusion reached, this paper attempts to make a contribution to a deeper understanding of this controversy as part of the process by which the Pagan community continues to explore issues of gender and inclusion while increasing its understanding of the Dianic tradition.

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Introduction

Womyn's spaces, constituted through interactions and engagements, have herstories fraught with conflict, negotiation and hurt (Browne, 2009, p. 546).

Radical feminists have a critique of patriarchy that is difficult to understand with a mere passing glance (Wwomenwwarriors, 2013, p. 4).

PantheaCon, billed as the largest Pagan convention in the world (2000-2500 attendees), happens annually in San Jose, California. The event includes a diverse group of speakers and public ritual activities. In 2011, controversy arose when those holding a Dianic ritual, turned away a man and several transgendered women at the door with an explanation that the event was womyn¹-only. While not the first incident of its kind at a Pagan event, it was one that has created much fallout, including commentary from many prominent Pagan figures, the publication of a tome dedicated to the issue, challenges to similar rituals at the 2012 event and the formal severing of ties within the Dianic (womyn-only) tradition from its founder by at least one coven.

The “debate” over Dianic use of womyn-only space has existed as long as the Dianic tradition has, and has been regularly questioned/challenged by other Pagan traditions, the trans community, and other women’s spirituality groups. But the PantheaCon 2011 controversy was something different: the challenge came from transgendered persons, and rather than challenging the idea of womyn-only space, the basis of the challenge was in who was being included in, and who excluded from, the definition of womyn (Barrett, 2004; Eller, 1995). The reaction of Dianic leader Z. Budapest to the controversy, and the inclusion of her womyn-only ritual at PantheaCon 2012, led to action from some in the Pagan community and a renewed discussion that revolved

¹ I am using the term “womyn” as a substitute for the more controversial terms “woman-born woman” or “genetic women” (radical feminist theory/practice) and ciswoman (gender/queer theory/practice).

around three issues: how was the term “womyn” being defined, how should leaders be expected to act in the Pagan community, and what is the role of exclusive ritual space at large Pagan events? This discussion happened online in the form of blog/social media posts and commentary threads, and included individuals that self-identified as being part of the Dianic womyn or trans women community as well as members of the overall Pagan community who felt connected to the issues presented at PantheaCon. This paper, through an analysis of this blog/social media discussion and a review of the relevant literature, will attempt to make a contribution to a deeper understanding of this controversy that begins with the premise that all involved have an equal and valid need for support from the Pagan community. It is hoped that this paper can be part of the process by which the Pagan community continues to explore issues of gender and inclusion while increasing its understanding of the Dianic tradition and womyn-only space.

An Explanation of the Dianic Tradition

Paganism in the western world does not have deep roots, although some earth-based traditions within it (e.g. those followed by Afro-Caribbean and First Nations persons) have long and/or unbroken histories of practices. And although there are threads that can be traced back to earlier time periods, it was really only in the 1950s that the (re)constructed traditions commonly referred to as Wicca came into being and only in recent decades that Pagan religions have started to gain legitimacy in mainstream society (Clifton, 1992; Eller, 1995; River, 1991). The common elements that bring the majority of these traditions together under the umbrella of Paganism are

few. A nature-based philosophy/theology and a recognition that the divine is both male and female are two of the more general points of agreement (Barrett, 2004; Eller, 1995).

The feminist² spirituality movement did not come about from this Pagan revival, but instead has its roots in the second wave of the feminist movement in the 1960s/70s (just at the time the Pagan revival was reaching the shores of North America) (Budapest, 1989; Eller, 1995). There are many forms of feminist spirituality. Some women remain faithful to their religion of birth but attempt to reform it to include women's perspectives/voices. Others leave the religion of their birth and create their own spiritual traditions. Dianic Wicca is one of the latter. It was developed in large part by Z. Budapest, who claimed to have learned witchcraft from her mother (and her mother from a family friend, and so on back in an unbroken line³ that stretched back to the days when Paganism was a more dominant religion). She encouraged radical feminists to blend politics and spirituality to create a stronger feminism (Barrett, 2004, 2012; Budapest, 1989; River, 1991; Wwomenwwarriors, 2014).

It is true, as Eller (1995) points out, that “[f]eminist spirituality and mainstream neopaganism coexist and overlap, usually (but not always) quite happily, but they are not the same thing” (50). Feminist spirituality is not based on hierarchy, and values individual learning/leadership over training from an established leadership. Rabbit (2011) notes that her ordination as a Priestess in Budapest's Dianic Lineage was based on what she had already done, not as the first step of learning from Budapest. Feminist circle structure can be eclectic and draw on experiences/figures from a variety of cultures, part of the second wave's push to uncover

²There are subtle but important differences between “women's spirituality” and “feminist spirituality.” Women's spirituality is a broader, more encompassing term that includes all women's work in religion. Feminist spirituality has a more political focus. This paper focuses on the latter, as Dianic Wicca is clearly a feminist tradition. However, the former does exist and has also influenced Paganism (River, 1991).

³ A line of this nature, where knowledge is passed from teacher to student, is referred to as a lineage.

women's herstory in general (Anderson & Zinsser, 1988; Barrett, 2004; River, 1991; Spender, 1982).

The major differences between feminist spirituality and Paganism are gender-based. While Paganism in general, and Wicca in particular, are based on a presumed male/female duality and hold rituals that include all genders, this is not necessarily the case for practitioners of feminist spirituality (LaPratt, 2011; River, 1991; Wwomenwarriors, 2014). Dianic Witches, in particular, have a cosmic worldview that centres on the Goddess's life transitions as the Wheel of the Year (rather than Wicca's view of the seasons as part of the changing relationship between God and Goddess) (Budapest, 1989; Mountainwater, 1991; Roberts, 1998). In the 1971 manifesto for the Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1, Budapest (1989) made it clear that Dianic Wicca was a women's religion:

We are committed to teaching wimmin how to organize themselves as witches and to sharing our traditions with wimmin. We are opposed to teaching our magic and our craft to men until equality of the sexes is a reality (Eller, 1995, p. 57).

Although some Dianics, including Budapest herself, have rethought this stance and worked with men in certain circumstances, there is still a clear commitment to working primarily with and for women. This has caused no end of controversy in Paganism over the years. As Barrett (2012) writes: "When the lens through which one sees the world is male-centric, it is inconceivable from that perspective that our female gatherings were simply not about them" (108). In the 1990s this stance was starting to become more accepted within Paganism and, at larger gatherings such as PantheaCon, space was made for Dianics to have their own, women-exclusive, circles (Barrett, 2012).

Women/Womyn: Definitions and Controversies

In order to create womyn-only space, there must be a definition of womyn. This necessarily creates productive exclusions that bring gender into being in ways that are temporally and spatially specific (Browne, 2009, p. 548)

Dianic Wicca is based on and rooted in radical feminist theory, whose core premise is that women as a class are oppressed by men as a class (Wwomenwarriors, 2013). The overarching, perhaps simplistic ideal, is that women are connected by the shared experiences of being born female and having grown up socialized as female in a patriarchal world. Gender is therefore constructed, not based on biology (Echols, 1989; Sweeney, 2004). Women who have had these shared experiences and who connect over them have been said to connect through a shared sisterhood, a “revolutionary fact” where women bond “...for the purpose of overcoming sexism and its effects, both internal and external” as in the consciousness-raising groups of early feminism (Daly, 1973, p. 265) This does not mean that all women have the same experiences: there are issues of race, class, sexuality, ability and other “isms” that intersect within radical feminist theory and allow the exploration of how different women experience similar moments in their lives (Daly, 1989; Sweeney, 2004; Wwomenwarriors, 2013).

At the same time, Dianic Wicca’s roots have been influenced by cultural feminism, which grew out of radical feminism itself and supported the idea of creating women’s own spaces, arts and institutions as a partial response to the overwhelming male-ness of society (Echols, 1989). The rituals that have been created within Dianic Wicca are specific to women’s needs and relate to women’s experiences by being grounded in the common life cycles of women. Again, this is not to say that all women experience the same events or relate to them in the same way, but that the life cycles celebrated (for example, menarche and childbirth) are

experiences that can happen only to women (Barrett, 2012; Come As You Are Coven, 2012). Or, more to the point, for followers of the Dianic path, biological women (womyn):

Dianics support all people in finding their paths to the Goddess; however, we do not recognize hormonally and surgically-altered men as female, and therefore hormonally and surgically-altered men and transgender men who self-define as women, are excluded from participating in our tradition. Women's Mysteries cannot be understood nor experienced through chemical or surgical alterations to a male body (Barrett, 2004, p. 423).

This view of women as womyn is where the problem at PantheaCon originated.

What Really Happened at PantheaCon

PantheaCon is a conference for “for Pagans, Heathens, Indigenous Non-European and many of diverse beliefs” that occurs every February in the United States of America. The weekend event has over 200 workshops, presentations and rituals that are offered to the more than 2,000 individuals who attend (PantheaCon, 2014b). Anyone who wishes to lead a convention event must submit an application, and not every submission is approved (PantheaCon, 2014a). Approved presentations are included in the program with a description written by the individual(s) leading the event (Rabbit, 2011).

Pantheacon 2011

The Rite of Lilith ritual was presented by the Amazon Priestess Tribe (“APT”) – an affinity group and closed circle of the Come As You Are Coven (“CAYA”). The APT is a Dianic circle which practices in womyn-only space and performs many of its rites skyclad (in the nude). Although the ritual description included the words “Amazon” and “skyclad” there was no explicit mention that it was a womyn-only ritual:

The Rite of Lilith

Dark Queen, known to all as the One Who Would Not Be Conquered. Matron Goddess of fierce women who know their power. Sacred whore of antiquity, whose lust purifies and cleanses. Join the Amazon Priestess Tribe for an ecstatic, undulating, life-affirming ritual in honor of Lilith. This ritual will be skyclad to the degree you are comfortable, so please come prepared with a light wrap or blanket as needed (Rabbit, 2011, p. 3).

Technical difficulties delayed the start of the event, and when Rabbit went to gather the last of the participants she encountered several individuals who wished to participate. As they were people who looked male and/or were people she knew lived as men full-time, she addressed them thusly:

I said, “This is going to be a naked ritual for women. I am so sorry this was not clear in the program, but that is what it is. So, if you are not a woman, willing and able to be naked among other naked women, this is not the ritual for you” (Rabbit, 2011, p. 7).

In the CAYA official response (2012), Rabbit again apologized for the misunderstanding and notes that the issue of womyn-only space “...versus transgendered-inclusive spaces for worship is a longstanding one that did not begin with this ritual and will not end with this ritual” (19).

One blogger noted that this incident "...demonstrated how exclusive rituals, however defined, can put the PantheaCon organization in the awkward position of enforcing the ritual's rules and implicitly endorsing the event" (Korman, 2012, p. 2). PantheaCon did issue an official statement which encouraged community dialogue (either with them directly or as part of the larger community discussion centres) and asked for patience as they determined what steps to take for PantheaCon 2012 (Korman, 2012).

Pantheacon 2012

It was [the] *combination* of the ritual description *and* it being led by someone well-known for bigotry against trans women *and* its timing in the wake of the events of the last year that *add up to* the ritual being an insult to trans women. It was that having this on the convention schedule implied that such an insult is an accepted part of Pagan culture (Korman, 2012, p. 6)

Events at PantheaCon 2012 were clearly the result of, and heavily shaped by, the Pagan community's discussions post-PantheaCon 2011. The schedule included many events that addressed gender in the Pagan community and how it was changing the nature of Pagan practice. CAYA offered a ritual, The Rite of the Bear Mother, which was open to all who self-identified as women. There was also a Dianic ritual, The Sacred Body of Women, which was clearly marked "genetic women only" [womyn-only] and was to be led by Z. Budapest, a well-known elder and founder of the best-known of the Dianic⁴ Traditions:

The Sacred Body of Women (Self-Blessing)

This skyclad ritual honors the body of each and every woman present, the beauty and grace of the feminine form in all of her infinite variety. Allow yourself to be embraced by the glorious love of your sisters, with voices raised in sacred song in

⁴ There are disagreements about whether Budapest is the founder of "the" Dianic Tradition or the founder of "one of the" Dianic Traditions. Much of this disagreement has emerged as part of the dispute discussed in this paper and should be seen in that light; see, for example, Nevo (2012). Older texts, including River (1991) and Eller (1995) are clear on Budapest's significant role in creating and sustaining the Dianic Tradition.

this central ritual of the Dianic Tradition. Genetic women only (Korman, 2012, p. 2)

Budapest's feelings on the PantheaCon 2011 incident, and on the push to include trans women in womyn-only space, were well-known. Her statement post-PantheaCon 2011 included language that some labelled "hate speech" as she clearly defines trans women as men who are trying to destroy the work of feminists:

You can tell these are men, They [sic] don't care if women loose [sic] the Only [sic] tradition reclaimed after much research and practice, the Dianic Tradition. Men simply want in. its [sic] their will. How dare us women not let them in and give away the ONLY spiritual home we have! (Budapest, 2011)

One of the PatheaCon 2012 attendees was T. Thorn Coyle, herself a well-known figure in the Pagan community who had engaged in much of the dialogue about the gender issue even before the ATP ritual. On the morning of both rituals, she posted a statement on her blog that explained her decision to not accept the situation as it was:

After all the work so many put in last year, my heart could not let this stand unmarked. So I decided to engage in another form of dialogue: sitting in silence. Z has the right to perform her ritual. I have a right to sit outside in silence and prayer (Coyle, 2012a, p. 2).

Other PantheaCon attendees requested, and were invited, to participate in this action,⁵ and although a definitive count was never done reports place the ratio of people outside versus those at the ritual as 3-1, 4-1 or possibly even 10-1 (Eruca, 2012b; Filan, 2012). Budapest (2012) herself put out a call for support online which shows that she felt the action was protesting womyn-only space and not her words. However, she did read from a prepared apology prior to the ritual that mentions her previous words to the community (Coyle, 2012e; Korman, 2012; Wolf, 2012).

⁵ Coyle has stated several times that she never named her action as a protest, but there are several in the community that have named it so.

The Pagan Community Reacts

The issue of female-born versus transgendered-inclusive spaces for worship is a longstanding one that did not begin with this ritual and will not end with this ritual. It is an issue loaded with questions, theories, competing realities, and personal trial all around – Lady Yeshe Rabbit (Come As You Are Coven, 2012, p. 19).

Gamson (1997) writes that "...social movements depend on the active, ongoing construction of collective identity, and that deciding who we are requires deciding who we are not" (178-179). There are many identities being created and challenged in this situation by the three communities involved: the Dianic Wicca community (and allies); the trans community (and allies); and the Pagan community (in which some of the former reside). It is difficult to clearly identify who are the three movement entities (protagonist, antagonist and audience) are, as definitions are being recreated and boundaries are being redrawn within the community (Gamson, 1997). The communities, and the people within them, overlap and connect in many different ways. In a situation like this, it is vital for participants to remember that "...we don't always have control over how people respond to us, and that's where the integrity of one's intentions are very important" (Ensler & hooks, 2014, p. 47).

In their response to the Pagan community, CAYA noted that:

..the conversations about gender now happening around and about our organization have already been happening within the organization for several years. They will continue to happen and we will continue to evolve with our community's needs (Come As You Are Coven, 2012, p. 21).

For all three communities, the conversation(s) that were started at PantheaCon continued online on established news/community sites (primarily *The Wild Hunt* and *Pagan Newswire Collective*), on social media channels (primarily Facebook) and on personal blogs (author responses and readers comments).

In the online conversation, three broad themes emerged (Schulz, 2012). They were:

1. Are trans women women?
2. Should leaders with controversial views be allowed to hold rituals or workshops at shared community spaces (conventions and festivals)?
3. Is there a place for exclusive rituals at shared community spaces (conventions and festivals)?

Womyn/Women

Do not confuse our advocating for genetic female space in our religion with trans-oppression or transphobia. Labeling us this way ends the discussion, creates hostility, and overemphasizes divisions within the greater [P]agan community. ... Labeling our tradition as transphobic if we do not recognize trans-women as equivalent to genetic females denies our biology and female reality, informed by the very cells within our bodies (Barrett, 2012, p. 110).

In order to create womyn-only space, “womyn” must be defined. There is a long history of frustration, misunderstanding and anger between radical feminists and the trans community on this issue. Because Dianic Wicca aligns with and is rooted in radical feminism, this history has now spilled over into the Pagan community. Barrett (2012) believes the difference is a simple one. Dianics are working to deconstruct how patriarchy defines and limits what a woman is, while trans women are trying to construct new identities within the definitions patriarchy has set out. As such, because "...Dianic tradition is a religion for genetic females. ... [w]e get to define what 'woman' means in our tradition" (109).

Dianic Wicca uses two metrics to define who is a womyn for its tradition. First, a person has to have been born female, which gives them access to the Blood Mysteries⁶ (a series of rituals/celebrations based on the female life cycle). Second, a person has to have grown up female and experienced life transitions as a female. As trans women were not born female and have not grown up female, they are not eligible to participate in Dianic rituals or circles (Barrett, 2004, 2012; Come As You Are Coven, 2012). This definition is used to support other instances when womyn-only space is desired, such as the Michigan Womyn's Festival (Browne, 2009; Gamson, 1997).

Dianic Wicca cites the need for safe space as another reason that their right to womyn-only space should be not merely accepted but supported. Those who have been born and raised female in patriarchy are very likely to have experienced trauma, and womyn-only rituals like that offered at both PantheaCon 2011 and 2012 are part of the healing process. This is especially true for women who have experienced sexual abuse at the hands of men. Dianics argue that including a pre-op trans woman in a circle of this nature would be re-traumatizing for a woman (Barrett, 2012; Rabbit, 2011). The comments of those who belittled or dismissed this healing or engaged in "Oppression Olympics"⁷ tactics to argue that trans women experience more trauma than womyn and therefore should be allowed in their circles, not only missed the point of safe space but also demonstrated that trans women (and their allies) are not necessarily feminist even if they do identify as women (Ace, 2012; Maggie, 2012; Ruadhan, 2012). If they are not feminist, then

⁶ In a Pagan context, "Mysteries" do not refer to something that is secret (and therefore cannot be discussed with outsiders) but to some event/process that must be experienced (in a ritual sense) in order to be completely understood (Barrett, 2004).

⁷ A term describing a situation where two or more oppressed groups (or those allied with them) use debate to compete and prove that they are more oppressed than the other(s). It can be used as a way of derailing conversation or silencing those with whom the debater(s) disagree.

Sweeny (2004) is correct in stating that "...the notion that trans-women would assume that they may enter women-only space demonstrates the inability of trans-women to empathize with women's experiences" (81). If this is true, then it makes even less sense to include trans women in womyn-only circles. Instead, trans women may find their desires for acceptance and inclusion in other Pagan community groups "...as there are so many other communities which welcome them with open arms and love..." (Rootrealm, 2012a, pp. 23–24).

Leaders

No one protested "a Ritual" we protested the hurtful speech on an individual in a respectful manor. These are real issues that need t[o be] discussed openly in our community. The protest was the response to hateful language uttered by its organizer. The attempt to make the conversation about the larger issue is intended to side step the very real issue of hate speech in our community (Dybing, 2012, p. 13).

Leadership is an exchange relationship and implies some kind of social contract between those leading and those being led (Kellerman, 1999; McGill & Slocum, 1998). Paganism is a young religion, and many of its elders are still alive and engaged, so it is not surprising that Z. Budapest became personally involved post-PantheaCon 2011. The words attributed to her were described as angry, hurtful, or as a form of hate speech depending on the individual's connections to and/or understanding of the trans community (Coyle, 2012g; Rabbit, 2012a; Rootrealm, 2012b; Wolf, 2012). Filan's (2012) comment reflected the latter point of view. "The fact that Budapest is a respected elder in the [Pagan] community does not justify her words: rather, it makes them more heinous" (p. 2). Similarly, her apology prior to the ritual at PantheaCon 2012 was accepted by those with links to Dianic Wicca and dismissed by those who

were more in support of the trans community. Coyle's (2012f) opinion that Budapest's statement felt like a "half-apology interspersed with excuses" rather than a true apology and desire for change, only served to further the divide in the community. As another commentator responded, "...[you] appear to be saying, 'well that is just not good enough for me' when in the interest of community it might be better to help with the healing and to have compassion...." (SwanSpirit, 2012).

Those who supported Budapest saw this part of the controversy as part of a pattern where the younger generation dismisses or undermines its elders (Filan, 2012; Korkodilos, 2012; Rory, 2012; Ruthroc, 2012; Townsend-Crow, 2012). Bart (2000) spoke of this as radical feminism becoming less radical. Perhaps the same is true of Dianic Wicca, illustrated by the move by the Amazon Priestess Tribe to formally sever ties with Budapest after PantheaCon 2012 because of her words (Dybing, 2013; Rabbit, 2012b). But there are many Dianics who do not have the same problem with Budapest's words, and it is with them that the social contract continues.

Rituals

I don't see anyone sitting vigil outside of men-only ritual and space. If you are really serious why not campaign against the Bohemian club? Oh that's right, you've chosen the most vulnerable link you can find, women-only space under patriarchy. Brave cowards (Eruca, 2012a)!

The final issue being debated as a result of the PantheaCon incidents was whether or not exclusive rituals had a place at a public gathering. The Dianic rituals were not the only ones at PantheaCon which were exclusive or had restrictions on who could participate. Several commentators mentioned one ritual at the 2012 PantheaCon that did not allow women who were menstruating to participate, and there were others listed as being offered to men only, women

only, and one that required adult participants to have a child with them (Adler, 2012; Coyle, 2012d, p. 3; Rabbit, 2011). It is important to understand that exclusive rituals, or specific reasons for exclusion of specific populations, happen for different reasons. In the case of the oft-cited ritual that excluded menstruating women, one of the organizers of the ritual appeared online to explain why the exclusion had occurred:

The request that menstruating women not participate (in truth all they are asked to do is to not salute the spirit Danbala-Wedo) is not about menstruation or even about women.⁸ It is about blood, and ANYONE, cis or trans or more than one gender, is not permitted to be bleeding when serving this spirit. Had I cut myself on the way to the ritual, I would've had to exclude myself as well, even if I was in charge of the ritual (Tann, 2012).

Although Coyle (2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012g) several times tried to make clear that her action was not about banning womyn-only circles at PantheaCon, she did believe it important that the co-created space of the Pagan community include decisions about what should and should not happen there. To make these kinds of decisions in relation to womyn-only space, it is necessary to understand what this space represents. In her exploration of separatist space, Browne (2009) found that the main motivation in creating womyn-only space was as a means to challenge the power and hierarchy of the patriarchy. This is consistent with the original development of such spaces in the 1970s and how they evolved in certain areas (e.g. women's shelters) in the present day (Echols, 1989; Sweeney, 2004). For Dianic Wicca, womyn-only spaces are a place where ritual is used to facilitate healing from the wounds of patriarchy while creating the energy required to continue the political goals of the struggle. They include elements of consciousness raising, celebration of the body and mourning for that which has been lost

⁸That is not to say that there are not rituals/ceremonies where menstruating women are not allowed to participate. In 2013, for example, menstruating women were asked to exclude themselves from a smudging performed at a Project Ploughshares Calgary workshop by First Nations elders.

(Barrett, 2004, 2012; Budapest, 1989; Mountainwater, 1991; River, 1991). But those who participate are aware of what it means to gather without men:

While on the surface or from afar, a women's ritual may seem like an innocently simple affair, *in the context of patriarchy it is a radical and subversive act and statement for change.*" (emphasis in original) (Meade, 2014, p. 4)

If the Pagan community accepts the right of Dianic Wiccans to define womyn-circles as they wish, and if the leadership of rituals held at public gatherings is not an issue, then what does this mean for trans women who wish to participate in ritual space at public gatherings? Perhaps allowing for exclusive ritual space will allow them to create their own rituals, ones that honour and celebrate their life experiences, while also offering larger rituals that encompass the whole of the community (Barrett, 2012; Browne, 2009). Perhaps the recognition that "[w]e are all wounded in some way, and all healing in our own ways...[a]nd sometimes we cannot do this work together, at least not yet" (Pemburn, 2012, p. 3) will be enough for the Pagan community to weigh the needs of different groups within it in a new way.

Conclusion

In these years of circling and sharing, many women have recovered their sacred selves and a sacred sisterhood, mirrored in the face of the Goddess. We grew strong and found our own voice. We created our own forms, naming ourselves and asserting our own identity. We affirmed ourselves and each other. We claimed religious autonomy apart from male institutional approval. We grew up (Roberts, 1998, p. 5).

Paganism may be "...a living, growing, changing religion and as such we as people live, grown, learn and change" (Rosemary, 2012, p. 22), but that does not mean that we are all growing at the same rate or in the same direction. The discussions that took place around Dianic Wicca and its use of womyn-only space highlighted that there are distinct differences between Dianics and the Pagan community, and that the Pagan community may be less of a community than it thinks itself to be. It also demonstrated that there are differences between womyn and trans women that are more than just biological, and that radical feminist theory is still very much a part of the Dianic tradition.

"Women's gains follow the pattern of two steps forward and one step back, forming a spiral rather than a straight line" (Bart, 2000, p. 23). The spiral is sacred in Dianic tradition, representing a journey that will take us to clarity. The Pagan community may have an interest in what happens as a result of this controversy, but it is Dianic womyn who have the power to make decisions for their tradition. What those will be, and how that impact will spiral out into the Pagan community, remains to be seen. In a community where the male and female are recognized as sacred, Pagans may have a different lens to bring to the gender inclusion debate, but they still are impacted by the expectations and limitations of the other communities they intersect with.

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